

## **The Rev. Debra Slade testimony on HB 7027, February 23, 2017**

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Rev. Debra Slade and I am a registered voter in Ridgefield, Connecticut. I am testifying regarding HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget. I am particularly concerned about the proposed "consolidation" cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHB), which would, in fact, eliminate those entities. As the President of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board, a hospital chaplain, and an Episcopal priest in Connecticut, I am very familiar with the urgent need to more adequately support and serve those in our state who live with mental health and addiction issues. The current budget proposals put our RMHBs at grave risk, and if passed would mean losing our state's ability to receive cost effective, independent, community-based assessment of our behavioral health system. This is important grassroots feedback on all aspects of our state's \$700 million behavioral health system. Without the RMHB's coordination with community partners to collect regional information and develop priorities for the DMHAS, the needs assessments required in the state application for federal funding may be impacted, thereby putting the 23 million federal dollars received for CT's behavioral health programs and initiatives at serious risk.

The RMHB's provide an impressive structure that allows important and needed grassroots engagement through the Catchment Area Councils (CACs). These councils provide a critically needed forum for those most directly impacted by mental health and addiction issues, and their families to work together with community providers to find better ways to serve the needs of the behavioral health community. This creates better understanding, promotes effective and empowering advocacy, and collectively works to improve the lives of those who are most affected.

The amount of funding given to the 5 RMHBs, \$584,400, is very small, only 0.08% of the DMHAS budget, and helps to generate \$23 million in federal funding! The RMHBs have an impressive history of cost-effectiveness and critically needed support to the mental health and addiction communities in Connecticut. In my ministry as a chaplain and priest, I have personally witnessed how important it is to empower those most affected by mental health and addiction issues with a forum to express their needs and concerns. I believe that the RMHBs create a consistent, effective structure for this to take place. I strongly urge you to not accept the Governor's 2018 budget proposal that would "consolidate" the RMHBs with the Regional Action Councils by means of a funding cut that would result in their elimination.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and all the work you do to support those in our community with mental health and substance use disorders.

Respectfully,

The Rev. Debra Slade, BCC  
President,  
Southwest Regional Mental Health Board